



# Information Brief

## Service-Learning

*“Alienated,” “isolated,” and “disaffected” are terms that have been used to describe youth who display violent behavior. Youth who become violent often feel that they don’t belong, that no one cares about them, and that they don’t matter. Researchers have established a link between youth violence and a lack of youths’ connection to their schools and communities. Service-learning is a strategy that can help youth feel more engaged.*

**CRITICAL ELEMENT ADDRESSED:** *School staff, families, and community develop, communicate, and support clearly defined, appropriate high behavioral expectations. School-wide proactive discipline plans that promote respectful, responsible behavior are developed and implemented by all key stakeholders.*

### INTRODUCTION

Service-Learning is a “way to involve young people in learning through participation in thoughtfully organized service that meets real community need” (National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993). Service-Learning allows those involved to see, first-hand, the value of learning through experience, applying academics to the service of others and reflecting on what has been accomplished.

By being involved in Service-Learning, students have the opportunity to apply what they learn in the traditional classroom to the service of others. They can see their academic study put to use in the *real world*, giving meaning not only to the act of contributing to the community, but to continuing their academic studies, as well.

### HOW CAN SERVICE-LEARNING IMPACT ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE?

Research indicates that allowing youth to contribute through community service, lead social change, develop marketable skills, and build ongoing relationships with caring adults has a positive impact on the development of assets or protective factors. These assets buffer students from problem behaviors, including violence, and reduce the disengagement and sense of alienation that put youth at risk. Service-Learning can make a significant contribution to the lives of youth, especially youth at-risk.

### WHAT CHARACTERIZES SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-Learning engages students, educators and community in the planning and execution of the project chosen. Overseen by educators, administrators, and involved community members, students generate ideas for projects. This process illustrates the reciprocal relationship in which the *service* reinforces the learning and the *learning*

strengthens the service. Service-Learning provides for a structured time in which students reflect on their service and learning experiences. Teachers award credit for learning, not for the number of hours of service provided.

### WHAT EFFECT DOES SERVICE-LEARNING HAVE ON THE SCHOOL?

Service-Learning creates an environment where the students, teachers and administrators have to work with an open line of communication in order to succeed. The cooperation of each component is necessary to set goals, designate responsibilities, and create a strategic plan.

### HOW DOES SERVICE-LEARNING AFFECT THE COMMUNITY?

Service-Learning is reciprocally beneficial to both students and the community. Students become an active part of the community as they work toward a common goal with community members. Their efforts provide a much-needed extension of resource, addressing and meeting local needs by providing thousands of hours of service to people in need, non-profit agencies, private sector companies, non-governmental and governmental agencies in the areas of education, public safety, human service and the environment.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE-LEARNING TO THE STUDENT?

Evaluations show that service-learning has a strong impact on both academic learning and citizenship. In a national study conducted by the Corporation for National Service, for example, students scored higher on four measures of academic importance: grades, grade point averages in core subjects, engagement in school, and education aspirations (E.C.S., 1999).

In addition, students learn through experience that being of service to others is a worthwhile, lifelong endeavor. By viewing each service activity *from the inside*, they can incorporate service into their daily lives. Service-Learning helps the students put into perspective the real purpose of what they learn in school by giving them the opportunity to use real skills to answer a need in the community.

- Elementary students develop understanding and build friendships across the generations while visiting a convalescent home.
- Third-grade students learn mathematics, chemistry and ecology as they sponsor an aluminum can drive to raise funds to buy and plant trees in the community.
- Middle school students develop graphing skills as they study rural and urban nutritional data.
- Middle school students add to their own understanding of government as they tutor immigrants in U.S. history in order to help them pass the citizenship test.
- High school students apply mathematics, physics and vocational skills while designing and building low-income housing.
- High school students study ecosystems as they work with the Department of Natural Resources to reclaim a dump site and construct a nature trail.

#### HOW CAN WE IMPLEMENT A SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM IN OUR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY?

**Prepare** by laying the groundwork for integrating Service-learning projects into the school curriculum.

- Train the participants.
- Identify a school or community-based need.
- Research the need.
- Choose a specific project.
- Design the action plan for that project.

**Take Action** by implementing the plan. This can take more than one direction:

- Develop a new Service-Learning project. For example, set up a Reading Buddies program with a senior citizen center.

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT IT:

- **Web sites:**
  - Iowa Department of Education, Service-Learning: [www.state.ia.us/educate/sl](http://www.state.ia.us/educate/sl)
  - National Youth Leadership Council: [www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org)
- **In this Handbook:** See “*Success4* Critical Elements” and articles on *Positive Youth Development*, *Youth Leadership/Empowerment*, *Character Education*, *Resiliency*, *Frameworks*, and *After School Programs*.

- Support an existing plan such as protecting deteriorating rain forest or prairie, contributing to food pantry or clothing drives.
- Engage in social action by modeling democratic participation in public issues and decision making.

**Reflect** on the results of the student’s project and the correlation between the service and learning components.

- Before: What needs do we have in our community and how can we make a difference in these areas?
- During: How is our project progressing and what might we change to improve upon it?
- After: What did we learn and how can we share this with others? Where do we go from here?

**Celebrate** by recognizing youth as a valuable part of the community. Renew the commitment to service and thank community leaders and participants.

#### SUMMARY

Service-Learning creates a partnership that benefits all participants involved. By motivating students to make a difference in their communities, Service-Learning gives students a clear picture of the importance of their classroom activities. As students increase their academic skills, they unknowingly develop empathy, self-esteem, social awareness and responsibility, and a sense of caring for others in their community. And the community, in turn, sees youth as active, compassionate and productive members of the community.

*The youth population has been misnamed the self-centered generation. There’s a strong desire to serve others. The problem we face in America today is not a lack of willingness to serve others, but to find the appropriate outlet for this.*

- George Gallup